

Species and Habitat Action Plan Assessment Form

Field 1: Action Plan details

Species/Habitat Action Plan	SKYLARK <i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Lead Partner/Agency	RSPB
Steering Group/Other organisations	Covered by the umbrella Lowland Farmland Bird Species Action Plan Steering Group which is responsible for 10 BAP species. Current membership: BTO, CCW, DANI, DETR, DoE(NI), EHS, EN, FRCA, GCT, JNCC, MAFF, PSD, RSPB, SNH, SOAEFD, WOAD.
Work programme in existence?	Planned for February 2000

Field 2: Objectives and targets overview

Number and text	UK	E	NI	S	W	Comments
4.2 'Maintain present breeding numbers, wintering numbers and distribution throughout the UK'		Y	Y	Y	Y	Country targets to be considered by February 2000
4.3 'Reverse the population decline on lowland farmland and other habitats where found to be declining'		Y	Y	Y	Y	
4.4 'Protect the skylarks habitat, particularly during the breeding season'		Y	Y	Y	Y	

Field 3: Proposed actions overview

Number and text	UK	E	NI	S	W	Action significant?	Action complete or ongoing?
5.1.1 'In the light on the outcome of action re 5.5.2 consider the need for incentives for maintaining and re-establishing permanent pasture, reducing pesticide use, retaining field margin features and introducing winter stubbles.'		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ongoing
5.1.2 'Consider the requirements of the skylark in any negotiations on changes to or reform of agricultural support.'	Y					Y	ongoing
5.1.3 'Consider further improvements to the set-aside regulations to reduce the harmful effects of cutting and wide spectrum herbicides'	Y					Y	ongoing
5.1.4. 'Review procedures for testing, introduction and replacement of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals to assess indirect effects on non-target species before approval for use is given.'	Y					Y	ongoing
5.1.5 'Encourage a more cautious and targeted use of pesticides on farmland.'		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ongoing
5.2.1. Encourage sympathetic management of rotational set-aside'		Y	Y	Y	Y	N	ongoing
5.4.1. Disseminate information on skylark conservation to farmers and farm advisory services.		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ongoing
5.5.1. 'Survey habitat use to determine the distribution of farmland skylarks in relation to crop types'.	Y					Y	complete

5.5.2. 'Undertake a detailed ecological study on skylarks on lowland farmland to determine the reasons for decline, including examination of crop preferences, breeding success diet and food supply'	Y					Y	complete
5.5.3. 'Ensure annual monitoring of breeding skylarks through the BTO/ JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey'		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ongoing
5.5.4. 'Assess the wintering population of skylarks to put the UK population into a European context.'	Y					Y	complete
5.5.5. 'Pass information gathered during survey and monitoring of this species to JNCC or BRC so that it can be incorporated into national databases'	Y					N	not started
5.5.6. Provide information annually to BirdLife International on the UK status of the species to contribute to maintenance of an up-to-date global red list.	Y					N	not started
5.6.1. Ensure the problem of the decline of farmland birds has a high profile, using the skylark as an illustration		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ongoing

Field 4: Assessment of status

	Not appropriate	Recovered	Signs of recovery	No change	Declining	Lost	Insufficient information
UK					Y		
England							Y
Northern Ireland							Y
Scotland							Y
Wales							Y

Common Birds Census (CBC) trend stable or slightly declining after severe decline between mid 1970s and mid 1980s.

UK Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend shows a statistically significant¹ decline of -5% between 1994 & 1998

1. 'statistically significant' means that the observed decline is unlikely to be an artefact (of say, sampling strategy) and exceeds pre-defined criteria for it to be accepted as a real change by the scientific community

Field 5: Summary statement

Considerable progress has been made in understanding the requirements of the skylark as a result of a the large amount of research which has been undertaken. Progress has also been made in that all four countries have implemented new or revised agri-environment schemes which include prescriptions for sympathetic management of lowland farmland for wildlife.

These schemes are still under-funded, however, and the targets set out in this plan are unlikely to be achievable until agreements are implemented on a much wider scale. However the recently agreed reform of the CAP gives Member States the powers to redirect subsidies from production to environmental management. The Government is consulting on whether and if so how, these powers should be used.

Field 6: Signing off

Please 'sign off' the form below to confirm that steering group members or key contacts have been consulted and agreed the information provided.

Contact details	Lead Partner	Contact Point
Name	Dr A D Evans	
Organisation	RSPB	
Assessment date (dd/mm/yy)	27/09/99	

Completed forms should be submitted to JNCC

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 Joint Nature Conservation Committee
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 Peterborough PE1 1JY
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Objective/target	4.2 'Maintain present breeding numbers, wintering numbers and distribution throughout the UK'				
Country	Not appropriate	Target achieved	Some progress	No progress	Insufficient information
UK				Y	
England					Y
Northern Ireland					Y
Scotland					Y
Wales					Y
<p>Country targets yet to be determined. Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trends have not yet been produced by the British Trust for Ornithology for England or Northern Ireland (although trends for England may be available by the end of 1999). Although country trends are available between 1994 & 1998 for Scotland and Wales the Welsh figure is based on a small sample size. It has therefore been decided not to present any country trends in this report.</p> <p>UK BBS trend shows a statistically significant¹ decline of -5% between 1994 & 1998</p> <p>A paper describing winter numbers and distribution as measured by the 1997/98 BTO winter skylark survey is currently in press with Bird Study.</p> <p>1. 'statistically significant' means that the observed decline is unlikely to be an artefact (of say, sampling strategy) and exceeds pre-defined criteria for it to be accepted as a real change by the scientific community</p>					

Objective/target	4.3 'Reverse the population decline on lowland farmland and other habitats where found to be declining'				
Country	Not appropriate	Target achieved	Some progress	No progress	Insufficient information
UK					Y
England					Y
Northern Ireland					Y
Scotland					Y
Wales					Y
<p>Analyses of skylark BBS trends on individual habitats have not yet been undertaken by the BTO. It is hoped that such trends will be available for the next round of reporting.</p>					

Objective/target	4.4 'Protect the skylarks habitat, particularly during the breeding season'				
Country	Not appropriate	Target achieved	Some progress	No progress	Insufficient information
<i>UK</i>	Y				
<i>England</i>			Y		
<i>Northern Ireland</i>			Y		
<i>Scotland</i>			Y		
<i>Wales</i>			Y		
<p>All four countries have agri-environment schemes in place which include measures which seek to ensure positive management of arable and grassland habitats that are favourable to the skylark, and a number of agreements specifically take the conservation requirements of this species into account.</p> <p>In England beneficial measures are present in the new pilot Arable Stewardship Scheme within Countryside Stewardship (CS) in particular but are also present in some ESAs, the main CS scheme and the Habitat Scheme (former Set-aside Option). Set-aside has also been shown to benefit skylarks although this is not an agri-environment measure and any benefits may therefore be temporary</p> <p>Equivalent schemes operate in Northern Ireland (Countryside Management Scheme & ESAs), Scotland (Countryside Premium Scheme & ESAs) and Wales (Tir Cymen & ESAs, both replaced by Tir Gofal in 1999).</p> <p>All these schemes are currently constrained by available budgets. The scale of protection or enhancement of habitats for such a widely dispersed species that is currently possible within these schemes will not be sufficient to permit targets 4.2 & 4.3 to be met at a country scale.</p>					

Table B: Proposed actions (Copiable table)

Published action/organisation(s) responsible	5.1.1 'In the light on the outcome of action re 5.5.2 consider the need for incentives for maintaining and re-establishing permanent pasture, reducing pesticide use, retaining field margin features and introducing winter stubbles.' DANI, MAFF, SOAEFD, WOAD	
Work plan/organisation(s) responsible		
Action/workplan undertaken?	yes	
Description of work taken and organisation responsible	<p>DANI: Countryside Management Scheme recently introduced. This includes prescriptions for enhancement of lowland farmland skylark habitat.</p> <p>MAFF: The three year Pilot Arable Stewardship Scheme within Countryside Stewardship contains a suite of measures being trialed to benefit farmland birds. The success of the pilot has yet to be assessed. The requirements of BAP priority species were taken into account in recent (1996–98) quinquennial ESA scheme reviews and some tier options were modified accordingly. These are summarised in the BAP tables published in individual ESA Consultation Documents. One output of these reviews was the introduction of new arable and grassland prescriptions that will provide conditions beneficial for skylarks. Some ESAs offer arable reversion prescriptions which may conflict with the interests of arable species.</p> <p>CS scheme consultation is carried out at regular intervals to define regional targets which in many cases address regional BAP priorities. The scheme contains options for the management of field margins.'</p> <p>SOAEFD: Recently introduced the Countryside Premium Scheme. This includes prescriptions for enhancement of lowland farmland skylark habitat.</p> <p>WOAD: Providing funding to CCW to establish and run new all-Wales agri-environment scheme, Tir Gofal.. This includes prescriptions for enhancement of lowland farmland skylark habitat.</p>	
Output and timescale	Pilot Arable Stewardship. First agreements 1998; due to run until 2002. Tir Gofal ; first agreements due late 1999. Countryside Premium Scheme; first agreements 1997, Countryside Management Scheme; first agreements spring 2000.	Action by DANI MAFF SOAEFD WOAD
Constraints to action	The scale of protection or enhancement of skylark habitat achievable given the current resources available for these schemes will not be sufficient to permit objectives 4.2 & 4.3 to be met Agri-environment schemes have to balance wildlife objectives with others concerning landscape, historic features and access; and spending is currently limited by budgetary constraints. As voluntary schemes they cannot guarantee full coverage of all eligible sites .	
Action complete or ongoing?	ongoing	
Next steps	To be determined by Steering Group	
Output and timescale	To be determined by Steering Group	Action by

Published action/organisation(s) responsible	5.1.2 'Consider the requirements of the skylark in any negotiations on changes to or reform of agricultural support'. DANI, MAFF, SOAEFD, WOAD	
Work plan/organisation(s) responsible		
Action/workplan undertaken?	yes	
Description of work taken and organisation responsible	The recent reforms of the CAP (Agenda 2000) appear to offer little opportunity for providing the requirements of skylarks through mainstream agricultural support. This, despite both NGOs and MAFF pressing for substantial reform of the CAP and increasing the proportion of the CAP budget linked to environmental benefits. Notwithstanding this, agri-environment schemes will continue to take account of BAP species under the new Rural Development Regulation.	
Output and timescale		Action by
Constraints to action	CAP reform hampered by relative inflexibility in EU. If skylark habitat is to be delivered on a sufficient scale to meet the plan objectives it is imperative that increased funding is made available for environmental measures. It is likely that sufficient extra resource could only be delivered by redirection of production subsidies.	
Action complete or ongoing?	ongoing	
Next steps	MAFF will continue to press for further CAP reform.	
Output and timescale	To be determined	Action by

Published action/organisation(s) responsible	5.1.3 ' <i>Consider further improvements to the set-aside regulations to reduce the harmful effects of cutting and wide spectrum herbicides</i> ' DANI, MAFF, SOAEFD, WOAD	
Work plan/organisation(s) responsible		
Action/workplan undertaken?	yes	
Description of work taken and organisation responsible	MAFF have proposed to the EU a series of changes to the set-aside rules that could benefit the skylark	
Output and timescale		Action by MAFF
Constraints to action	Set-aside is a market support mechanism which is an integral part of the EU Arable Area Payments Scheme. Its primary purpose is as a production control tool, but within the UK MAFF has sought to have management rules for set-aside that enable farmers to maximise potential environmental benefits. Care needs to be taken including set-aside within mechanisms for achieving BAP targets because it is not an environmental mechanism and its stability is dependent on market conditions. The set-aside rate has initially been set at 10% under Agenda 2000 reforms.	
Action complete or ongoing?	ongoing	
Next steps	To be determined by Steering Group	
Output and timescale	To be determined by Steering Group	Action by

Published action/organisation(s) responsible	5.1.4. 'Review procedures for testing, introduction and replacement of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals to assess indirect effects on non-target species before approval for use is given.' DANI, MAFF, SOAEFD, WOAD	
Work plan/organisation(s) responsible		
Action/workplan undertaken?	yes	
Description of work taken and organisation responsible	MAFF have recently commissioned further research into the role of the indirect effects of pesticides in the declines of farmland birds, and to investigate how the risk assessment and risk management of indirect effects under the pesticides approval system could be improved. The work is being undertaken by CSL, GCT, RSPB & ITE. In addition, DETR have established a sub-group of ACRE to consider the wider biodiversity issues related to the release of GMOs, and their work has clear implications for the future assessment of pesticides in relation to their use on GM crops.	
Output and timescale	Initial conclusions on efficacy of current procedures under the pesticides approval system in assessing indirect effects will be available in first half of 2000. Research results on indirect effects due 2002	Action by MAFF, CSL, GCT RSPB, ITE
Constraints to action		
Action complete or ongoing?	ongoing	
Next steps	Pending research results Initial conclusions are due early in the New Year and will be considered by the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides.	
Output and timescale	Pending research results	Action by

Published action/organisation(s) responsible	5.1.5 'Encourage a more cautious and targeted use of pesticides on farmland.' DANI, MAFF, SOAEFD, WOAD	
Work plan/organisation(s) responsible		
Action/workplan undertaken?	yes	
Description of work taken and organisation responsible	MAFF (PSD): The Statutory Code of Practice for the safe use of pesticides on farms and holdings was revised and reissued in 1999. The revision included strengthened guidance on environmental protection generally. The Pesticides Forum aims to promote the adoption of Integrated Crop Management (although whether pesticide reduction goes far enough under ICM to deliver biodiversity benefits needs to be fully investigated) and other initiatives directed at reducing the impact of pesticides. A variety of activities by Forum members, including research and development, training, advice, demonstration and crop assurance support these objectives.. Increased Government support and stronger market demand for organics is leading to increased conversion of farms. Agri-environment schemes encourage reduced use of pesticides and fertilisers.	
Output and timescale		Action by MAFF
Constraints to action		
Action complete or ongoing?	ongoing	

Next steps	Whilst progress has been made the Forum needs to give full consideration to the targets and proposed actions contained in the SAPs for farmland species	
Output and timescale	To be determined	Action by

Published action/organisation(s) responsible	5.2.1. <i>Encourage sympathetic management of rotational set-aside</i> CCW, DoE(NI), EN, SNH	
Work plan/organisation(s) responsible		
Action/workplan undertaken?	yes	
Description of work taken and organisation responsible	<p>RSPB have undertaken a self-funded research project looking at the effects of different management of set-aside on farmland birds. RSPB have also produced a guide to promote the sympathetic management of set-aside with the support of the NFU. This has been distributed to farmers and advisors, including through the NFU to its members.</p> <p>MAFF have funded a BTO study looking in more detail at the breeding season. MAFF have also proposed to the EU a series of changes to the set-aside rules that could benefit this species. MAFF has encouraged through derogations and guidance, the management of set-aside in ways designed to benefit this (and other farmland bird) species. MAFF funds FWAG and ADAS to provide free initial conservation advice, focusing on set-aside and field boundaries.</p>	
Output and timescale	Evans, A.D 1997. Proceedings of the 1997 BCPC Weeds conference 907-915,. Buckingham <i>et al</i> 1999 <i>Bird Study</i> 46 157-169. Henderson, I & Evans A D in prep. Proceedings of the 1999 BOU conference on Farmland Birds	Action by RSPB NFU MAFF BTO
Constraints to action		
Action complete or ongoing?	ongoing	
Next steps	To be determined by Steering Group	
Output and timescale	To be determined by Steering Group	Action by

Published action/organisation(s) responsible	5.4.1. <i>Disseminate information on skylark conservation to farmers and farm advisory services.</i> DANI, MAFF, SOAEFD, WOAD	
Work plan/organisation(s) responsible		
Action/workplan undertaken?	yes	
Description of work taken and organisation responsible	<p>MAFF: Sponsored the RSPB publication <i>A Management Guide to Birds of Lowland Farmland</i> by GW Dodds, MJ Appleby and AD Evans, produced in association with the BTO, FWAG and GCT. The publication has been disseminated to advisers to inform them about farmland bird conservation and to improve the quality of advice that they give. This species is given detailed coverage. An associated A4 sheet giving detailed advice about this species has been produced for the adviser to pass on to farmers and land managers. This sheet was distributed by MAFF to all farmers with more than 100ha of arable.</p> <p>SOAEFD: Sponsored, along with SAC, the RSPB publication <i>A Management Guide to Birds of Scottish Farmland</i> by R Badger, D McCracken and S Sankey. It has the same aim and associated A4 sheets as the MAFF sponsored publication above.</p> <p>RSPB: Published the above, also <i>Farming and Birds in Wales: A Management Guide</i> by N R Thomas & N W Lewis. Has run a programme of seminars and workshops, often in association with other conservation bodies, to train dedicated farm advisers (eg CCW, FWAG, FRCA, SAC) which focus on the farmland bird BAP species. See also 5.2.1.</p> <p>BAA: <i>Published Arable Wildlife: Protecting non-target species.</i> Supported by RSPB, LEAF, GCT & FWAG.</p>	
Output and timescale	See above.	Action by RSPB MAFF SOAEFD SAC GCT FWAG FRCA BAA BTO
Constraints to action		
Action complete or ongoing?	ongoing	
Next steps	New research results will be used to update the information given by RSPB to farmers and advisors	
Output and timescale		Action by

Published action/organisation(s) responsible	5.5.1. 'Survey habitat use to determine the distribution of farmland skylarks in relation to crop types' CCW, DoE(NI), EN, JNCC, SNH	
Work plan/organisation(s) responsible		
Action/workplan undertaken?	yes	
Description of work taken and organisation responsible	BTO: undertook self-funded National Breeding Survey (1997) and Winter Survey (1997/98) which provide information on habitat use at national and regional scales. JNCC (on behalf of country agencies) : Commissioned BTO to carry out major project on winter farmland birds which will provide a larger database on winter habitat use. MAFF: commissioned BTO/Oxford University to investigate relationships between Breeding Atlas data and agricultural land use. DETR: have commissioned BTO to survey birds in a subsample of the 1km squares covered as part of Countryside Survey 2000. Results will be related to detailed habitat information collected in CS2000 and also Land Cover Map 2000.	
Output and timescale	Several scientific papers in review or in press. Winter survey to commence 1999/2000, otherwise action complete. DETR/BTO CS2000 survey to be conducted in 2000 and report in 2001.	Action by BTO, MAFF, JNCC DETR
Constraints to action		
Action complete or ongoing?	largely complete. Some aspects ongoing.	
Next steps		
Output and timescale		Action by

Published action/organisation(s) responsible	5.5.2. 'Undertake a detailed ecological study on skylarks on lowland farmland to determine the reasons for decline, including examination of crop preferences, breeding success diet and food supply' CCW, DoE(NI), EN, JNCC, SNH	
Work plan/organisation(s) responsible		
Action/workplan undertaken?		
Description of work taken and organisation responsible	RSPB: Have recently completed such a detailed study, funded by Tesco Stores Ltd in their role as Species Champion. BTO: analysed & published Nest Record data on breeding performance trends. MAFF: funded BTO/Oxford University to analyse Nest Record, Breeding Atlas and CBC data.	
Output and timescale	Chamberlain & Crick (1999) <i>Ibis</i> 141; 38-51. Donald. Thesis due for submission n October 1999. Several scientific papers in next two years Revision of RSPB advisory material in 2000.	Action by RSPB TESCO BTO Oxford University MAFF
Constraints to action		
Action complete or ongoing?	complete	
Next steps	n/a	
Output and timescale		Action by

Published action/organisation(s) responsible	5.5.3. 'Ensure annual monitoring of breeding skylarks through the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey'	
Work plan/organisation(s) responsible		
Action/workplan undertaken?		
Description of work taken and organisation responsible	JNCC: have continued to part fund BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (which covers skylarks) on behalf of the country agencies. RSPB: have also continued to part fund BBS	
Output and timescale	Noble <i>et al</i> (1999) The Breeding Bird Survey 1998. BTO/JNCC/RSPB - Annual report	Action by JNCC, BTO, RSPB
Constraints to action	None	
Action complete or ongoing?	ongoing	
Next steps	Maintain current programme	
Output and timescale	Annual Report as above	Action by JNCC, BTO RSPB

Published action/organisation(s) responsible	5.5.4. <i>Assess the wintering population of skylarks to put the UK population into a European context.</i> JNCC	
Work plan/organisation(s) responsible		
Action/workplan undertaken?	yes	
Description of work taken and organisation responsible	JNCC: funded the BTO/JNCC Winter survey of 1997/98 which has provided a preliminary estimate	
Output and timescale		Action by JNCC BTO
Constraints to action		
Action complete or ongoing?	complete	
Next steps		
Output and timescale		Action by

Published action/organisation(s) responsible	5.6.1. Ensure the problem of the decline of farmland birds has a high profile, using the skylark as an illustration. CCW, DoE(NI),EN, SNH	
Work plan/organisation(s) responsible		
Action/workplan undertaken?	yes	
Description of work taken and organisation responsible	BTO: Save Our Skylarks Appeal 1997, regularly giving coverage of farmland bird declines in BTO News & national press. RSPB: Skylark appeal, regularly giving coverage of farmland bird declines in Birds Magazine, national press and scientific publications. British Ornithologist's Union held a major conference on Lowland Farmland Birds in spring 1999. RSPB & BTO with sponsorship from Tesco's organised a workshop on international skylark research which followed on from the BOU conference.	
Output and timescale		<i>Action by</i> RSPB, BTO
Constraints to action		
Action complete or ongoing?	ongoing	
Next steps	To be determined by Steering Group	
Output and timescale		<i>Action by</i>